

Abgadiyat

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Guidelines for Contributors

Guidelines for Contributors

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Introduction

The tenth issue of *Abgadiyat*, an annual journal issued by the Center for Calligraphy Studies, expresses the continuity of the Center and its constant aspiration to win the trust of scholars and researchers who are interested in its publications of refereed scientific material and specialized works in the field of writing and inscriptions. Since its first issue in 2006, *Abgadiyat* has assumed the responsibility of bridging the gap between the different fields of calligraphy and writing studies. The Journal seeks to achieve the Center's major objective of providing specialists with the rare information they need for their studies in writing and inscriptions, as well as raising the awareness of this field amongst non-specialists.

Followers of this Journal will find a variety in its published topics. Yet, the topics focus on one, mutual field: writings and inscriptions; the papers tackle the same topic from different perspectives. *Abgadiyat*, which promotes the values of difference, diversity, and accepting the other, includes in its tenth issue a selection of Arabic and English researches that cover a wide range of topics for scholars all over the world. In this issue, some papers focus on the study of Islamic writings, such as those inscribed on Yemeni coins dating back to the period between 696 AH and 721 AH or on the walls of an Ayyubid mosque in Damascus; and the writings that emerged during the era of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Other papers study Ancient Egyptian writings—including the astronomical and cosmic symbols—on the quarries of Wadi al-Hudi, and also the writings on a funerary stela dating back to Middle Kingdom of Egypt. Topics related to the Greco-Roman civilization; the ceremonies held for goddess Neith in the towns of Sais and Esna in Egypt during the Greco-Roman period; and the inscriptions of Constantine city, east Algeria, that date back to the period from the end of the third century BCE to the fourth century CE are also tackled. All this proves the universality of *Abgadiyat*, which tends to cover all the alphabets and writings ever witnessed in history in a way that creates a balance among different themes of research.

The Center for Calligraphy Studies is always keen to emphasize the continuation of this Journal in order to fill in an obvious shortage in scientific research, in spite of what this dedication entails of increased, ample efforts exerted by editors to deal with various languages, inscriptions, and their different writing methods.

Essam Elsaed

Director of the Center for Calligraphy Studies

The Illumination of Lamps (*Lychnokaia*) for Neith in Sais/Esna in Greco-Roman Egypt

احتفال المشاعل للإلهة نيت في سايس / إسنا في مصر في العصر اليوناني-الروماني

Youssri Abdelwahed*

ملخص

ينقسم البحث إلى ثلاثة أجزاء، يتناول الجزء الأول الأدلة المختلفة التي تتحدث عن احتفال المشاعل في النصوص المصرية القديمة واليونانية بدءاً من هيرودت في القرن الخامس قبل الميلاد؛ حيث ورد ذكر احتفال المشاعل لأول مرة في النصوص اليونانية، ثم الأدلة المختلفة التي تؤكد استمرار احتفال المشاعل في العصر اليوناني-الروماني. وهي البردية رقم ١٧ من برديات الحبية في الجزء الأول، وكذا أحد نصوص سجل احتفالات معبد إسنا المؤرخة بعصر تراجان. ومن الجدير بالذكر أنه لا يوجد في النصوص المصرية القديمة ما يمكن أن نطلق عليه حرفياً 'احتفال المشاعل' للإلهة نيت؛ فهو أحد الطقوس الهامة، المرتبط بالإلهة نيت فقط وكذلك بالإله أوزيريس. أما الجزء الثاني من البحث، فيتناول رمزية المشاعل في الديانة المصرية القديمة وفي السحر؛ حيث يظهر مدى ارتباطها بالإله أوزيريس، ثم يأتي الحديث عن رمزية الاحتفال وارتباطه الوثيق باحتفال البعث الخاص بالإله أوزيريس في شهر كيهك. أما الجزء الأخير من البحث فيؤكد صعوبة الربط بين احتفال محدد ومجموعة معينة من السكان؛ فالاحتفالات في مصر في العصر اليوناني-الروماني أصبحت مناسبات دينية أو اجتماعية مدعواً لها كافة فئات المجتمع بغض النظر عن انتمائها العرقي أو وضعها القانوني.

The Festival of Lamps in Herodotus' Histories

The performance of ritual activities around or within the domestic space was an important feature of religious and social life of the Egyptian society since the Pharaonic period. The space in front of the main gate of the house was the locus of domestic and religious practices.¹ Domestic activities as spinning and weaving sometimes occurred before the main entrance of the house.² Certain ceremonies were also celebrated at the main gate of the house. The house depicted on the funerary papyrus of Nakht, now at the British Museum (EA 1047/72), for example, has been described as 'the home from the door of which he (Nakht) pays adoration to the gods'.³ Similarly, 'on the ninth day of the first month (Thoth), when every one of the other Egyptians eats a broiled fish in front of the outer door of his house, the priests do not even taste the fish, but burn them up in front of their doors'. Equally importantly, the sacrifice of pigs to Osiris on 15 Pachon, the first month of harvest (Shemu) and the ninth of the year, was also performed at the front door of the house.⁴

Writing in the fifth century BCE, Herodotus was the first classical author to mention, although in passing, a festival of lamps for Neith in Sais.

At Sais, on the night of the sacrifice, they (the Egyptians) all keep lamps burning in the open air around the houses. These lamps are flat dishes full of salt and oil, with a floating wick which keep burning all night. This is called the Festival of Lamps (*Heortes lychnokaies*) and even the Egyptians who do not come to this assemblage mark the night of sacrifice by burning their own lamps at home, so that on that night lamps are burning not only at Sais but throughout all Egypt. A sacred tale is told showing why this night is thus lit up and honored.⁵

The illumination of lamps took place at night before a certain sacrifice, presumably for Osiris. In this festival lamps were illuminated at night on 13 Epeiph (Julian: 24 June), the third month of harvest and the eleventh of the year, around and within Egyptian houses in commemoration of Osiris' death and resurrection.⁶ According to Herodotus, it was a representative celebration, in which all Egyptians participated not only at Sais, but throughout the country. Since this nocturnal ceremony was performed within and outside domestic properties, it probably linked the living space with religious rites and thus reflected a profound connection and integration between the private and public spheres on the one hand and religious rituals on the other. In his commentary on the second book of Herodotus, Alan Lloyd identified the flat dish lamp as Alan Gardiner's sign (R7),⁷ however, the sign does not represent a dish and Gardiner himself interpreted it as an incense bowl with smoke rising from it.⁸

Sais was probably the most important site where lamps illuminated for Neith. Herodotus writes that 'the Egyptians do not hold a single solemn assembly, but several in the course of the year...there is a third great festival (Illumination of Lamps) in Sais to Athena (Neith).⁹ The reason for particularly associating the Illumination of Lamps with Sais can also be found in Herodotus' *Histories*: 'The grave of Osiris was located at Sais and the sufferings of the god were displayed as a mystery by night on an adjacent lake'.¹⁰ Sais was the main venue for the performance of the Illumination of Lamps for another claim to fame of Sais was the nearby "grave of Osiris" and the passion-play of Osiris (mysteries) enacted on an adjacent lake.

Sais was one of the mythological destinations of funerary rituals for the deceased. The body of Osiris, it is known, was dismembered by his brother Seth into fourteen pieces. Aided by Anubis, however, Isis collected and buried the dispersed body of Osiris in different places, notably Abydos, Busiris, and Sais. In

their studies on Middle Kingdom coffins and the outer coffin of Merenptah, Harco Willems and Jan Assmann concluded that burial rites included a ceremonial passage of divine tribunal that the deceased has to pass on his way to Sais. According to the inscriptions of Merenptah, after the mummification process was completed Osiris was justified and crowned as King in the presence of the Enneads and the Two State Chapels. When Osiris reached Sais, his enemies were destroyed. Thus, the journey to Sais seems to incorporate Osiris' victory over his enemies and his coronation as King in the netherworld.¹¹ In Coffin Text spell 15, the judgment of the deceased is said to be pronounced by goddess Neith, which, according to Willems, is evidence that the trial of the deceased takes place near Sais.¹² The tragedy of Osiris was performed, presumably by priests assuming the roles of deities, at night on an adjacent lake at Sais, perhaps the sacred lake of the temple of Neith. The nocturnal performance of the tragedy of Osiris perhaps occurred at the same night as the Illumination of Lamps, namely 13 Epeiph. This connection would provide the rationale for burning lamps around or within houses at Sais and elsewhere.

Like Osiris, the Illumination of Lamps on 13 Epeiph is equally associated with goddess Neith, the patron of Sais.¹³ At Sais, Isis and Neith were assimilated to one another. Due to the association of Neith and Athena with war and weaving, Greek travellers, as Herodotus, Plato, and Diodorus, identified Neith-Isis with Athena and hence postulated a primordial link to Athens. Diodorus recounts that Athena built Sais before the Great Flood, which supposedly destroyed Athens and Atlantis. While all Greek cities were destroyed during that catastrophe, Egyptian cities, including Sais, survived.¹⁴ Thus, goddesses Isis and Athena were worshipped at the shrine of Neith at Sais.¹⁵ Writing

around the first half of the second century CE, Plutarch reports that 'they (the Egyptians) often call Isis by the name of Athena, which in their language expresses this sentence, 'I came from myself,' and is significative of a motion proceeding from herself'.¹⁶ He also records that 'in Sais the statue of Athena, whom they believe to be Isis, bore the inscription: 'I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered'.¹⁷ Philosopher Proclus (412–485 CE) similarly wrote that the adytum of the temple of Neith at Sais carried the following inscription: 'I am all things that are, that will be, and that have been, and no mortal has ever me unveiled. The fruit which I brought forth was the sun'¹⁸.

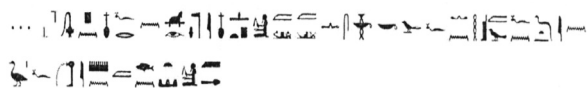
The identification of Neith and Athena is confirmed by classical writers and Greek papyri uncovered in Egypt. This is even mentioned in the Socratic dialogue *Timaeus*, written by Plato, quoted here:

In the Egyptian Delta, at the head of which the river Nile divides, there is a certain district which is named as the district of Sais, and the great city of the district is also named Sais, and is the city from which King Amasis came. The citizens have a deity for their founder; she is named in Egyptian Neith, and is asserted by them to be the same whom the Hellenes call Athene; they are great lovers of the Athenians, and say that they are in some way related to them.¹⁹

In Sais, at the time of Plato, the goddess is Neith; but the Greeks, as Plato, identify Neith with their goddess Athena. For Greeks, every foreign god could be given a Greek name and therefore identified with a Greek god. Greek documents confirm that Athena was also identified with many other local Egyptian goddesses. At Oxyrhynchus, for instance, she was assimilated with the hippopotamus-goddess Thoeris.²⁰

The Role of Lamps in Ancient Egyptian Religion and Magic

Besides being used for providing light in houses,²¹ lamps played a major role in ancient Egyptian religion and magic as they were closely associated with Osiris. In her consideration of the festival calendar at the tomb of Neferhotep, the divine father of Amun under Horemheb (TT 50) at Thebes, Lise Manniche drew attention to the association of the rite of the Illumination of Lamps with Osirian festivals attested in the calendar, namely making the Osiris bed on 18 Khoiak, and making the Osiris bed and other rites on 23 Mesore. A vignette from the tomb, known as the Bankes fragment, shows the son of the tomb owner presenting offerings, including a huge jar of ointment and two tapers. Although the first column of text is damaged, the remaining six columns read:

... 

... *tk3w pn nfr n Wsir it ntr Nfr-htp m m'ndt m msktt n ski.f nn htm.f n dt in s3.f w'c b imm-m-int m3'c hrw*

... this beautiful lamp for Osiris, the divine father Neferhotep, in the day bark and in the night bark. It shall not be destroyed. It shall not ever perish. Says his son, the wob-priest Ameneminet, justified.²²

It was necessary to provide light for the deceased on his journey through the underworld, and this is why a lamp is sometimes placed in the day and night barque of Osiris, King of the Underworld. Every deceased wished to be one of the followers of Osiris in the hereafter. During the Eighteenth Dynasty, the presentation of tapers was generally made by the priest, although on the occasion of a festival, friends might present them in pairs along with fat for their replenishment. This was a performance of the rite of affording light to the deceased in the dark necropolis.²³ One, two, or three wicks standing in a cup are shown

on the west walls of Tomb 51 at Deir el-Medina, where the god of flame, Sejti, presents them to Osiris or Anubis as the sun sets in the western hills; the personified Eye of Horus sometimes providing a similar lamp. An interesting representation in Tomb 51 shows the burning of tapers, where the accompanying text calls this rite 'kindling a light' (*irt tk3*). This rite is accompanied by the censuring and libation of offerings and by the mourning of women for the deceased. In the court of Tomb 23 at Deir el-Medina there is a long inscription, emphasizing the identification of the lamp with the Eye of Horus, presumably the left eye of Horus associated with the moon.²⁴

Lamps continued to be closely associated with Osiris during the Greco-Roman period. Osiriform lamps are attested in houses at Karanis and elsewhere in Greco-Roman Egypt and abroad. For example, a terracotta lamp found in House C11 at Karanis shows Osiris as a bust-length mummy (Fig. 1).²⁵

The Museum of Hatay (Antakya, Turkey) also preserves an Osiriform bronze lamp (inv. no. 7587) of the second or third centuries CE (Fig. 2). It is the shape of an individual entirely wrapped in a funerary bandage, which leaves only the face uncovered and measures 38 cm long and 8 cm wide.



The comparatively large size of this lamp, the material, and the Greek inscriptions on it suggested that it was not used simply to light a private house, but was used in a place of worship.²⁶ Paolo Gallo convincingly argued that Osiriform lamps were used in the ceremony of searching for and discovering Osiris' corpse.²⁷

(Fig. 1) A terracotta Osiriform lamp found in House 11 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum 6478 (Gazda, *Karanis: An Egyptian Town in Roman Times, Discoveries of the University of Michigan Expedition to Egypt (1924–1935)*, Ann Arbor, 40, Fig. 70).



(Fig. 2) An Osiriform bronze lamp at the Museum of Hatay (E. Laflit, M. Buora, A. Mastrocinque, 'A New Osiriform Lamp from Antioch in the Hatay Archaeological Museum', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 52 (2012), 422, Fig. 1).

The Greek magical papyri preserve many recipes in which lamps were used to perform mantic séances. Sometimes Osiris was invoked by the practitioners in front of a burning lamp. *PGM* VII.222–249 reports a prayer to Bes and the headless god in front of a lamp, and this sentence should be pronounced: 'You are the one who is over Necessity ARBATHIAO'. *PGM* XIV.174a–176a: 'The writings which you should write on the lamp: BAXYXSIXYX (and hieroglyphs) ... you should recite this other invocation to the lamp also. *Formula*: 'O Osiris, o lamp, it will cause [me] to see those above'.²⁸ Apparently god Osiris and the lamp were identified with each other, and so it is possible that the lamp allowed a manifestation by him, and perhaps was shaped in the form of this god. Similarly, *PGM* XXIIb.27–31 is a 'Request for a dream oracle to a lamp, which lights the way to Osiris'.²⁹ Also, *PGM* XIV.150–160 is a recipe in which a lamp is addressed as 'Osiris', and is prescribed to be put into a cavity of a wall.³⁰ This seems to be the archaeological context of the Osiriform lamps uncovered from houses at Karanis and elsewhere. The Osiriform lamps were probably used for performing mantic séances and other rituals, in which Osiris was supposed to be in some way forced to do what he was asked. Likewise, the image of Seth which is painted on the reverse of a lamp uncovered at Alexandria can be interpreted as a means to urge or even intimidate Osiris.³¹

Although Osiris was the principal god of death and of the underworld, he was also esteemed in the

domestic sphere. The presence of domestic cults of Greco-Roman and Egyptian deities suggests that religion was 'not limited by the sacred precincts of a temple or the liturgy of a priest'.³² Like many other festivities, the Festival of Lamps was celebrated within and around domestic properties.³³ As elsewhere, the visual and physical presence of deities in houses was an integral part of domestic religious life in Greco-Roman Egypt. Mural representations, statuettes, and terracotta figurines of deities probably served to extend the protective powers of these deities to the house occupants. Papyri indicate that children were taught to honor the gods and maintain their household shrines:³⁴ 'Please light a lamp for the shrines and spread the cushions', wrote Apollonia and Eupous in a domestic context to their younger sisters, Rhasion and Demarion.³⁵ In such important occasions as the Festival of Lamps, cushions were spread, prayers were performed by family members, and offerings were perhaps made to domestic deities in the light of oil lamps.

Lamp-lighting was associated with many festivals in ancient Egypt, the most important of which were those celebrated on the five epagomenal days of the year, following Mesore, the fourth month of harvest and the last of the year. The birthday of Isis was celebrated on the fourth epagomenal day.³⁶ The birthday of Horus was also celebrated with a lamp-lighting ceremony. Major ceremonies of lights occurred for the scared rites of Osiris on 22 Khoiak, when 365 lamps were lit.³⁷ The general practice of lamp-lighting was also part of rites for the care of the deceased, in which context the lamp flames could be considered as perpetuating the soul.³⁸ The lights of the Egyptian epagomenal days were placed for the deceased in tombs.³⁹ Lamps thus continued to be associated, and were identified, with god Osiris in Greco-Roman Egypt.

Evidence for Illumination of Lamps for Athena/Neith in Greco–Roman Egypt

Two festivals of Athena/Neith at Sais are mentioned in a religious calendar for the Saite nome.⁴⁰ *P.Hib.* I.27 is a religious calendar for the period 301–240 BCE, whose author explains in the preface that he learned the matter of his treatise in Sais from a very wise man, probably an Egyptian priest, who ‘Demonstrated the entire truth in practice using the stone dial, which is in Greek named the gnomon’.⁴¹ The papyrus lists the length of the day and night, astronomical and meteorological events, and the Egyptian religious festivals held at Sais. It confirms that the Illumination of Lamps for Athena/ Neith survived into the Ptolemaic period.⁴² Col. xii, lines 165–8 reads:

και .: εθν Σα/ι πανη/γ[υριφ Α0θηνα=φ και .: λυ/ξνουφ καιουσι κατα .: τη .: ν ξω/ραν.⁴³

‘And the Festival of Athena/Neith in Sais and the Illumination of Lamps in the *chora*.’

It is unclear whether the term *chora* here designates the countryside apart from Alexandria or the countryside of Sais.⁴⁴

A text in the festival calendar of the temple of Esna, which dates back to the reign of Trajan (98–117 CE) confirms that the Illumination of Lamps for Neith survived into the Roman period:



wḏ3 r pr m ḥtp dd mdw in ḥm-nṯr hy is ii(t) m ndm Nt iḥt wrt ii(t) m ḥtp hy n ii(t).s Nt wrt nbt ḫ-sny Mnḥt-Nbtw nbt ḫnt ntrt in ḥn^c psḏwt.s ḥtp ḥr st sti tk3(w) ^cḫ3 mmw pr ḥnw hrw nfr in b3ḥw ḥmwṯ ti hy niwt tn r-dr sr ^cwy irt.n s-nb r ḥd-t3 dj t3-snty m ḥb.

Going to the temple in peace. Recitation by the priest: Oh! Here came in joy, Neith the great cow came in peace! Oh! For her arrival, the great Neith, the mistress of Esna, Menheyt-Nebtu, the mistress of Khent-to. The goddess and her ennead appear at her temple; light the torches in great quantity inside the temple for men and women make festival! That this whole city gives shouts of joy and no one went to sleep until dawn! Esna is in festival!⁴⁵

Sais had no monopoly of the ceremony of the Illumination of Lamps for this calendar confirms that lamps were illuminated for Neith inside her temple at Esna on 13 Epeiph on the occasion of her arrival at the temple. The rite of the Illumination of Lamps was a notorious part of this nocturnal festival for Neith.

Plato also describes a festival of Athena in Libya, which is almost certainly a festival of Neith, although it remains unclear whether or not it relates to the Illumination of Lamps:

Next to the Makhlyes are the Auseans; these and the Makhlyes, separated by the Triton, live on the shores of Lake Tritonis. The Makhlyes wear their hair long behind, the Auseans in front. They celebrate a yearly festival of Athena, where their maidens are divided into two groups and fight each other with stones and sticks, thus, they say, honoring in the way of their ancestors that native goddess whom we call Athena. Maidens who die of their wounds are called false virgins. Before the girls are set fighting, the entire people choose the fairest maid, and arm her with a Korinthian helmet and Greek panoply, to be then mounted on a chariot and drawn all along the lakeshore. With what armor they equipped their maidens before Greeks came to live near them, I cannot say; but I suppose the armor was Egyptian; for I believe that the Greeks took their shield and helmet from Egypt. As for Athena, they say that she was daughter of Poseidon and Lake Tritonis, and that,

being for some reason angry at her father, she gave herself to Zeus, who made her his own daughter. Such is their tale.⁴⁶

It is also unclear whether the Illumination of Lamps for Neith survived into Late Antiquity Egypt. In a sermon entitled ‘The Lord Thundered’, the Christian abbot Shenoute of Atripe, who lived in the fifth century CE, criticized local inhabitants who light lamps and burn incense in their home on the day of the god Shai at Panopolis:⁴⁷

Woe to any man or woman who gives thanks to demons, saying that ‘Today is the worship of Shai of the village or Shai of the home’, while burning lamps for empty things and offering incense in the name of phantoms.⁴⁸

The passage refers to some kind of local festival and its domestic rites: a particular day is singled out for ritual activity, one ‘Gives thanks’ and one performs obligatory rituals with domestic paraphernalia. Indeed, the paraphernalia recalls not only the many terracotta lamps and incense burners extant from Greco–Roman Egypt, but also Herodotus’ description of the ancient domestic ‘Festival of Lamps’ in Sais.⁴⁹ The god Shai (Fate) would at this time have designated a local spirit popularly supplicated for protection and prosperity.⁵⁰ The Illumination of Lamps for Athena/ Neith thus survived into the Greco–Roman period and perhaps beyond.

The Symbolism of the Illumination of Lamps

Although in his passing reference to the Festival of Lamps, Herodotus ended his paragraph with reporting that ‘a sacred tale is told showing why this night is thus lit up and honored’,⁵¹ he unfortunately mentions nothing about this tale. Herodotus only narrates that the celebrants burned uncountable numbers of candles and lamps in an outdoor, as well as an indoor ceremony that lasted all night, but he

did not mention the reason for paying special honor to this night or for illuminating lamps. The ceremony of burning the lamps took place in a subterranean chapel beneath the temple of Neith at Sais, where lamps were carried in procession around the coffin of Osiris. It was by the power of light, which symbolized the life-giving power of the Moon, that Isis rekindled life in her deceased husband Osiris.⁵² The ‘Sacred tale’ attached to the Sais Festival was that the lights were to assist Isis in her search for the body of Osiris.

The celebration of the resurrection of Osiris, with whom the lamp was identified, and the birthday of the Eye of Horus, with whom the lamp is also associated, occurred in Epeiph. For in his monograph *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch reports that ‘In the sacred hymns of Osiris they call upon him who is hidden in the arms of the Sun; and on the thirtieth of the month Epeiph they celebrate the birthday of the Eyes of Horus, at the time when the Moon and the Sun are in a perfectly straight line, since they regard not only the Moon but also the Sun as the eye and light of Horus’.⁵³ Selene, or the Moon, is often used in classical writings on Egypt to refer to Isis, and this association probably provided the rationale for burning lamps in honor of Osiris, the husband of Isis, at night.⁵⁴ Scholars often consider Plutarch’s monograph a philosophical text, reflecting Middle Platonic metaphysical ideas about the genesis of the soul and the structure of the universe.⁵⁵ For Philip Scott-Moncrieff, the treatise reflected Plutarch’s narrow interest in the Hellenized Alexandrian cult.⁵⁶ Daniel Richter has recently argued that the *De Iside et Osiride* is a metaphysical discourse, demonstrating the superiority of Greek philosophy over Egyptian cult.⁵⁷ As the treatise provides a wide range of information about ancient Egyptian religion in general, and expresses deep knowledge of the cult of Isis and Osiris in particular, the Egyptian material in the monograph cannot be dismissed as worthless.⁵⁸ In fact, Plutarch’s accounts of Egyptian myths and rites, ‘Showed, on the whole, a remarkable reliability when

compared with the evidence of the Egyptian sources'.⁵⁹ Although the sources of Plutarch's composition cannot be identified with certainty, it is possible that some Egyptian texts were at his disposal during his visits to Alexandria,⁶⁰ Delphi or Athens. In Athens, Plutarch pursued his studies under the Platonist Ammonius, who had '*un nom grec d'Egypte*' and came to Athens from Egypt.⁶¹ For evidence on the contemporary cult of Egyptian deities, Plutarch also partly relied on his friend Clea, to whom the book is dedicated. Clea was a priest of Isis and of Dionysus at Delphi, and was thus acquainted with Egyptian cults.⁶² Plutarch himself was still a priest at Delphi and epimelete of the Amphictyons in 117 CE.⁶³

It is also unclear whether the Illumination of Lamps for Neith was related in some way or another to a ritual on 19 Athyr (Julian: 15 November), when Egyptian priests 'Go to the sea at night; and the keepers of the robes and the priests bring forth the sacred chest containing a small golden coffer, into which they pour some portable water which they have taken up, and a great shout arises from the company for joy that Osiris is found'.⁶⁴ The resurrection of Osiris and the burning of lamps around his coffin in a subterranean chapel at Sais took place on 13 Epeiph, while the reappearance of Osiris occurred in Athyr.⁶⁵ The two ceremonies are associated with the life cycle of Osiris. The Illumination of Lamps commemorated the time when Isis managed to regenerate the fourteen dismembered body of Osiris by the power of light, and this is why lamps were burnt on a full-moon night. As Isis succeeded in reviving the body of Osiris, the participants perhaps wanted to guarantee the recurrence of this event by annually lighting lamps at night on 13 Epeiph. Night was the most suitable moment for this rite, because of the moon's association with Isis and the left eye of Horus, which the god Seth/Typhon once destroyed.⁶⁶

Alongside the Illumination of Lamps on 13 Epeiph, another conspicuous ceremony was also dedicated

to Athena/Neith at Sais, 16–19 Mecheir (Julian: 12–15 February).⁶⁷ During this four-day period, a passion play was performed over the death of Osiris and the magic of Isis returning him to life. During the first day, actors would impersonate Isis and her son Horus, as well as various other gods as they searched across the world for the fourteen parts of Osiris' body. The second and third days showed the reassembly and rebirth of Osiris, and the fourth day was a wild rejoicing over the success of Isis and the coming of the newly immortal Osiris. It was believed that through the worship of Isis and strong devotion, the goddess will return the deceased to life and they shall experience eternal happiness under her nurturing care, just like Osiris.

I like to suggest that the Illumination of Lamps for Neith was part of the Osirian mysteries, and on this night Osiris, who was entitled 'Lord of the Underworld' and 'King of the Dead', was honored alongside Neith. Since the light of the lamps mirrored the light of the stars of heaven, it symbolized the creation of a pathway to the starry fields of the heavens, leading the deceased to their resting place in Amenti, the ancient Egyptian paradise for righteous souls. As a goddess of war, Neith was said to make the weapons of warriors, and when they died, she guarded their bodies until they could be buried. Furthermore, she is said to weave the bandages and shrouds worn by the deceased.⁶⁸ At the night of the festival where lamps were illuminated, Neith drew aside her veil, guiding the wandering souls to their true home with her living light. The lamps of Neith safeguard all those who undertake that journey into a new world, where they will find a new awakening. The attestations of land donations to temples to support the burning of lamps at Sais may reflect this idea.⁶⁹ Her veil is drawn aside not only for those who have left physical existence, but for those who are ready and willing to experience her living light as it illuminates the mysteries of the otherworld.⁷⁰

The Illumination of Lamps for Athena/Neith: An Ethnic Perspective

Although the ceremony of the Illumination of Lamps for Athena/Neith survived into the Greco-Roman period, the legal and ethnic status of the participants remains unclear. Ethnicity refers here to the expression of the self-conscious adherence to group identity.⁷¹ The Egyptianness of the festivity seems obvious from its existence in the Pharaonic period, yet there is no evidence that the ceremony was celebrated only by those who were legally defined as Egyptians in the Greco-Roman period. That only the houses of those who were legally defined as Egyptians were the arenas for the Illumination of Lamps is unknown. In Roman Egypt, the inhabitants were marked by their legal status, which determined their social, political, and economic privileges until Caracalla's extension of Roman citizenship to all free citizens in 212 CE.⁷² The Romans, Alexandrians, and probably other citizens of the Greek poleis, Naukratis, Alexandria, Ptolemais, and from 130 onwards, Antinoopolis, was at the top of the Roman legal structure. These groups were exempt everywhere from the poll-tax (*laographia*), levied on males between the ages of fourteen and sixty-two years.⁷³ Roman and Alexandrian citizenship of the parents was indispensable for their offspring to qualify for the same status.⁷⁴

The remaining of the population was referred to as the Egyptians (*Aiguptioi*). That is, the Roman authority applied the label 'Egyptian' to everyone living in Egypt, who was neither a Roman nor a citizen of the Greek poleis or Jew (*Ioudaios*), a designation that applied to metropolitans and villagers alike.⁷⁵ There were also various status divisions within this group. Even though many of them will have been of Greek ethnic origin, citizens of the metropoleis of the *chora* paid the *laographia* at a reduced rate,⁷⁶ while the ordinary people who inhabited the villages (*komai*) paid the full rate of the poll-tax.⁷⁷ The metropolitane group included

members of the gymnasium, who are known in papyri as 'those from the gymnasium' and had to prove in their examination (*epikrisis*) that their ancestors were members of the gymnasium.⁷⁸ In Fayum, the equivalent group to the gymnasia class was 'The 6475 Hellenes of the Arsinoite nome',⁷⁹ who were presumably the descendants of the Greek and Hellenized mercenaries settled in Fayum by the early Ptolemies.⁸⁰

Although there is no example of an *Aiguptios* who became an *Ioudaios*, or vice versa, an *Aiguptios* or an *Ioudaios* had access to both Alexandrian and Roman citizenship.⁸¹ Harpokras, the Memphite physician of Pliny, is an example of an *Aiguptios* who obtained Alexandrian and Roman citizenship, suggesting that it was possible for an individual to have multiple ethnicities.⁸² Harpokras might have experienced what George de Vos calls 'ethnicity flow', which refers to the ability of individuals to cross permeable ethnic boundaries to negotiate their identity.⁸³ Apart from the legal definition of identity, there are no other reliable signifiers by means of which individuals can be recognized as Roman, Greek, or Egyptian. Similarly, the relationships between members of an ethnic group, or between members of these ethnic groups are vague. That is, the cultural and social boundaries between these groups, if any, cannot be easily outlined. Although there is a huge number of documentary papyri which show day-to-day interaction between the persons involved, nomenclature is again an unreliable ethnic signifier.

Given the ethnic and cultural plurality of the Romano-Egyptian society, it is not impossible that members of other legal or ethnic groups, who were interested in the Festival of Lamps at least as a social occasion, could partake of it, if they wanted. Romans, Alexandrians, and citizens of Greek *poleis* such as Antinoopolis offered private donations to traditional Egyptian cults and temples, which were treated as part of their own religious culture.⁸⁴ Investigations

of the archaeology of *poleis* and *metropoleis* have also confirmed that urban centers were multicultural milieus, where Greco–Roman and Egyptian cultural traditions were closely integrated.⁸⁵ It is even argued that many Egyptian religious rituals were preserved in the Roman period through their incorporation into the dominant Hellenic milieu.⁸⁶ The traditional sacrifices of the ‘most sacred Nile’ and of the months of Tybi and Pachon respectively occurred in such distinctively classical structures as the hippodrome and theater at Oxyrhynchus.⁸⁷ Similarly, the birthday of the god Kronos/Souchos was held in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus at Ptolemais Euergetes.⁸⁸ The latter is probably related to a late third century text from Oxyrhynchus, which contains an invitation from the *gymnasiarch*, *prytanis*, *exegetes*, chief priest, and *kosmetes* to an actor and Homericist to a celebration of the birthday of Kronos.⁸⁹ Many festivities in the Greco–Roman period were therefore public in nature, and both civic and religious festivals were organized by the Hellenized members of the gymnasium and of the boule. The fact that some traditional festivals were held in classical-style public buildings suggests that public and religious occasions were the property of the inhabitants of the local community, regardless of their ethnic or legal status.

It is unclear whether Roman and Greek citizens participated in the Illumination of Lamps for Neith, and nothing is known about their behavior during this ceremony. Herodotus confirmed that the participants burnt lamps around their houses. Even those who could not come to the assembly were not precluded from sharing this cult activity with other inhabitants for they burnt lamps all night within their houses.⁹⁰ Although Herodotus undoubtedly meant the Egyptians when he talked about the participants in the fifth century BCE, Greek documents of the Greco–Roman period only mention the ceremony of the Illumination of Lamps for Athena/Neith as one of many in the religious calendar,

and do not give any prominence to the ethnic or legal status of the participants. The symbolism of burning lamps round, and within houses, was probably so simple and clear that it needed no explanation and was apparent to the participants. By burning lamps, the performers symbolically wanted to take part in reviving the body of Osiris.

There is no mention as to the space/place where the participants illuminated their lamps within houses. Yet, domestic shrines were appropriate arenas for this cult activity, particularly since a Ptolemaic papyrus, mentioned above, instructs to ‘light a lamp for the shrines and spread the cushions’.⁹¹ Although many Greek rituals associated with Athena involved torches used at night,⁹² the numerous terracotta statuettes found in Greco–Roman Egypt representing Athena/Neith holding a torch were perhaps used in the ceremony of the Illumination of Lamps, although this cannot be proven.⁹³ The domestic shrine of House C119 at Karanis is flanked on either side by a plain square opening for holding the brackets by which the oil lamps of the shrine could be clasped (Fig. 3).

At first glance, the architecture of the shrine shows specifically classical features, resulting from



(Fig. 3) The domestic shrine with holes for holding lamps in House C119 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum Archives 812 (E.M. Husselman, *Karanis: Topography and Architecture*, *Ann Arbor* 30 (1979), Fig. 54).

the Greco–Roman presence at Karanis,⁹⁴ which was a village with a high number of veterans, ‘the vast majority of whom owed their (Roman) citizenship to military service’.⁹⁵ Archaeology indicates that Karanis was a multicultural village, where Greco–Roman and Egyptian traditions were equally evident. Such domestic shrines indicate that worshipping gods in houses was not limited to a particular ethnic or legal group of inhabitants. Worshipping gods in domestic space had a long history in Greco–Roman and ancient Egyptian cultures. The presence of what we now refer to as Greco–Roman and Egyptian deities at Karanis is confirmed in papyri, on wall paintings, and from terracotta figurines.⁹⁶ A mural representation which survives in Karanis on the eastern side of a niche in the southern wall of House B50 represents Isis holding Harpocrates, Horus the Child, to her breast and suckling him (Fig. 4). The Thracian god Heron is shown riding a horse beside the goddess. The blending of Greco–Egyptian cults and religious themes in one single mural painting shows the different cultural traditions of the inhabitants of this house.⁹⁷

The depiction of Isis recalls the bust of Isis depicted on the ceiling of House B/3/1 at Kellis, where she is shown with her characteristic headdress, consisting of two bovine horns and solar disc with



(Fig. 4) The Thracian Heron and Isis suckling Harpocrates in House B50 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum Archive 5.2159 (Gazda, *Karanis*, 39, Fig. 68).

two plumes in between. Next to Isis, the god Serapis–Helios is depicted with a thick beard and a modius upon his head, suggesting that the god played a role in the domestic sphere.⁹⁸ Along with Soknopaios and Isis, Serapis–Helios was worshipped in the North Temple at Karanis, where a large horned altar bearing the head of the god was found in the outer court.⁹⁹ Based on their consideration of the archaeology and mural paintings of House B/3/1 at Kellis, Colin Hope and Helen Whitehouse concluded that the occupants had a shared cultural heritage with Greco–Egyptian features.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, the representational media in the House of Serenos in Trimithis visualized Greco–Roman heritage through mythology.¹⁰¹ Nothing can be said about the legal or ethnic status of the occupants, however. The variety of material and visual remains in house mirrors the complexity of Romano–Egyptian society, and suggests that the occupants of many houses experienced a culture in which Greco–Roman and Egyptian traditional features were intermingled.

Conclusion

A festival was held on 13 Epeiph for the goddess Neith in Sais/Esna, where lamps were illuminated in great quantity inside her temple. Inhabitants also illuminated lamps in connection with this festival around and within houses all over the country. This festival and ceremony is particularly associated with the god Osiris, who was identified with the lamp, and appears to have been related to the Osirian mysteries. Herodotus called the ceremony of the Illumination of Lamps as ‘the festival of lamps’ in the fifth century BCE, yet there is no presence of such a festival in ancient Egyptian calendars. The ceremony of the Illumination of Lamps was particularly associated with a number of festivals in ancient Egypt, including the *W3g* and the New Year’s Festival. *P.Hib.* I.27 and the festival calendar in the temple of Esna confirm that lamps continued

to be illuminated for Athena/Neith into the Greco–Roman period. The identification of the Egyptian Neith with the Greek Athena would have encouraged Egyptian and Greek inhabitants to take part in the Illumination of Lamps. This ceremony shows the complexity of connecting certain ritual activities with particular legal or ethnic groups. The literary and papyrological documents which concern the Illumination of Lamps for Athena/Neith do not pay particular attention to identify the ethnic or legal status of the participants.

Notes

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- 1 Cf. E. Abbas, Y. Abdelwahed, 'The Domestic Pylon in the Light of Greek Papyri', *Rosetta* 15 (2014), 1–27.
 - 2 D.J. Brewer, E. Teeter, *Egypt and the Egyptians* (Cambridge, 2007), 150.
 - 3 N. de G. Davies, 'The Town House in Ancient Egypt', *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 1:2 (1929), 248.
 - 4 Hdt. 2.48; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 7–8; Ael. *NA* 10.16; Y. Abdelwahed, *Egyptian Cultural Identity in the Architecture of Roman Egypt (30 BC–AD 325)*, *Archaeopress Roman Archaeology* 6 (Oxford, 2015), 84–91.
 - 5 Hdt. 2.62.1–2.
 - 6 *P. Hib.* I.27.165 = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, *The Hibeh Papyri* I (London, 1906), 144; S. Sauneron, *Les fêtes religieuses d'Esna : Aux derniers siècles du paganisme V* (Cairo, 1962), 302.
 - 7 A.B. Lloyd, *Herodotus, Book II: Commentary 1–98* (Leiden, 1976), 280–3.
 - 8 A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being An Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (London, 1957), 501.
 - 9 Hdt. 11.59.
 - 10 Hdt. 2.171.
 - 11 H. Willems, *Chests of Life: A Study of the Typology and Conceptual Development of Middle Kingdom Standard Class Coffins* (Leiden, 1988), 150–5; J. Assmann, *Altägyptische Totenliturgien I: Totenliturgien in den Sargtexten des Mittleren Reiches* (Heidelberg, 2002), 52–60.

- 12 Willems, *Chests of Life*, 149.
- 13 Hdt. 11.59; P. Wilson, *Sais I: The Ramesside-Third Intermediate Period at Kom Rebwa* (London, 2001).
- 14 Diod. Sic. 5.57.
- 15 S. Armstrong, 'The Veil of Isis: The Evolution of an Archetype Hidden in Plain Sight', *Rosicrucian Digest* 88:1 (2010), 51.
- 16 Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 62.
- 17 Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 9.
- 18 Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, 60–3; T. Taylor, *The Commentaries of Proclus on the Timaeus of Plato* (London, 1820), 82.
- 19 Plato, *Timaeus* 21e.
- 20 J. Quaegebeur, W. Clarysse, B. Van Maele, 'Athèna, Nèith and Thoëris in Greek Documents', *ZPE* 60 (1985), 217–32. Thoëris had at least four temples in the city (*PSI* III.215, 6; *PMert.* I.26, 4–5; *PMert.* I.26.5; *P.Oxy.* IX.1188.3). The main temple of Thoëris remained a topographical point and religious landmark in the early fourth century CE (*P.Oxy.* I.43, verso).
- 21 See: D.M. Bailey, 'Lamps from the Sacred Animal Necropolis, North Saqqara and the Monastery of Apa Antinos', *JEA* 87 (2001), 119–33.
- 22 L. Manniche, 'The Beginning of the Festival Calendar in the Tomb of Neferhotep (No. 50) at Thebes', *BdE* 97:2 (1985), 105–8.
- 23 *BD* 137B; J.G. Griffiths, 'The Horus-Seth Motif in the Daily Temple Liturgy', *Aegyptus* 38, No. 1/2 (1958), 3–10.
- 24 N. de G. Davies, 'A Peculiar Form of New Kingdom Lamp', *JEA* 40:1 (1924), 10–13.
- 25 Gazda, *Karanis*, 40.
- 26 E. Laflı, M. Buora, A. Mastrocinque, 'A New Osiriform Lamp from Antioch in the Hatay Archaeological Museum', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 52 (2012), 421–39.
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- 28 *PGM* XIV.174a–176a.
- 29 *PGM* XXIIb.27–31.
- 30 *PGM* XIV.150–160.
- 31 Cf. A. Mastrocinque, 'Riletture del mito di Osiris e Seth nella magia del Vicino Oriente', in S. Pernigotti and

- M. Zecchi (eds.), *Sacerdozio e società civile nell'Egitto antico* (Imola, 2008), 237–45.
- 32 A.K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs (332 BC–AD 642) from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (London, 1986), 183.
- 33 See: Abdelwahed, *Egyptian Cultural Identity*, Chapter Three.
- 34 Gazda, *Karanis*, 31.
- 35 *P. Athen.* 60.5–8 (323–30 BC).
- 36 Salem, *JRS* 27, 166.
- 37 J.G. Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros: The Isis Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, (Brill, 1975), 183.
- 38 A. Georgiadou and D.H.J. Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel True Histories: Interpretation and Commentary* (Brill, 1998), 150.
- 39 Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros*, 184.
- 40 *P. Hib.* I.27.76–77 (16 Mecheir), *P.Hib.* I.27.165–167 (13 Epeiph).
- 41 *P. Hib.* I.27.19–28; I.S. Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* (Cambridge, New York, 2011), 238–9.
- 42 *P. Hib.* I.27.166–7; F. Perpillou-Thomas, *Fêtes d'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine d'après la documentation papyrologique grecque*, *Studia Hellenistica* 31 (Leuven, 1993), 121–22; I.C. Rutherford, 'Down-Stream to the Cat-Goddess: Herodotus on Egyptian Pilgrimage', in J. Elsner and I. Rutherford (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman & Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford, 2005), 132.
- 43 *P. Hib.* I.27.166–9 = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, *The Hibeh Papyri I* (1906), 149.
- 44 I.S. Moyer, 'Court, Chora, and Culture in Late Ptolemaic Egypt', *AJP* 132:1 (2011), 15–44.
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